

# Tennessee Arts Commission

STRATEGIC PLANNING PUBLIC MEETINGS REPORT 2.19.2014

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## **Background**

As part of its statewide comprehensive strategic planning process, the Tennessee Arts Commission (TAC) partnered with local arts agencies across the state to host a series of public meetings. The meetings were meant to provide input at the local level on how the arts can move Tennessee communities forward and how the TAC can assist in making that happen. Each of the four meetings attracted over 100 participants from all walks of life at the two hour meetings listed below.

- ∞ November 20, 2013 - General Shale Brick Natural History Museum Visitor Center and Fossil Site, Gray, TN
- ∞ November 21, 2013 – Bessie Smith Cultural Center, Chattanooga, TN
- ∞ December 4, 2013 – Nashville Children's Theatre, Nashville, TN
- ∞ January 13, 2014 – STAX Museum of American Soul Music, Memphis, TN

1

With attendees welcomed by local leaders in each location, meetings consisted of three parts, a brief presentation by TAC Executive Director Ann Pope on the state of the arts in Tennessee, a moderated panel discussion of local leaders, and roundtable input sessions for all participants. TAC staff and local volunteers captured input from the roundtable discussions for posting on the TAC blog post [www.tnartscom.blogspot.com](http://www.tnartscom.blogspot.com) . Panel discussions were videotaped for future reference.

## **Panel Discussions**

In consultation with local arts leaders, three to four panelists were invited to participate for each session. They represented a broad range of stakeholders including arts leaders, business leaders, elected officials, and educators from the non-profit, for-profit, public and foundation sectors. In each meeting, the panelists were asked to talk about their perspectives on the arts in their region and why they have invested or participated as they have in the arts. Their comments were interesting and insightful and prompted much follow-up discussion. A list of panelists for each location is Appendix A.



Panelists in the tri-cities area focused on the economic development potential of the area's cultural heritage and offerings, with a small city mayor stating that investing in the arts was one of the smartest strategies a local elected official could pursue for his or her community. Another city official talked about the power of public art investments to revitalize key urban sites in a town. A regional theater director could cite hard data about the sizable economic impact of his regional organization's arts programming. And the head of a large local business and foundation talked passionately about the role of the arts in opening up potential for lifelong success among children in the area's remote rural communities.

The panel in Chattanooga focused on how the arts are and can make a difference in children's success in school, and how a vibrant arts and culture scene can help local communities with employee recruitment and satisfaction. The principal of an award winning K-8 elementary school talked about the public school's museum magnet theme that fully integrates the arts through out the curriculum. A major employer corporate executive stressed the importance of creativity as a qualification for jobs in the knowledge based economy. A highly place education administrator in Knoxville described the Knox County Arts 360 approach to incorporating arts education in all the schools in Knox County.

The Middle Tennessee meeting was held in Nashville and much of the panel discussion revolved around the importance of highlighting cultural heritage as a way of helping students succeed, and of helping communities forge an authentic future for themselves. A Nashville city council member suggested ways that arts advocates and local government could work together better on common goals. A physician/artist talked about how her community based arts program works with at risk youth. The COO of a local technology firm described how his firm incorporates creativity into employee work and development, including how employees helped design spaces in the new corporate headquarters. And a small town college president told how art was being used to help reconcile a difficult and divisive part of the community's past.

The location for the Memphis meeting, the STAX Museum of American Soul Music, set the theme for the day as the power of the arts to revitalize urban and rural communities. A local foundation executive talked about the need for realizing our authentic cultural assets as a framework for taking communities forward. A TAC board member and local arts advocate detailed the actual



dollar value to her community of its arts institutions and programming. An urban real estate developer described how he was using arts and culture to attract development, business, and new visitors to a core Memphis neighborhood. An arts agency official outlined the impressive graduation and college entry results of students in an enriched performing arts curriculum in Memphis's urban core.

### **Roundtable Discussion Input**

Prompted by ideas presented in the panel discussions, participants at each table began answering a series of three questions and their input was recorded by individual table facilitators. There was a lot of similarity among input at all four meetings with some regional variations on specific programs and opportunities.

1. How are the arts positively impacting your community? Give specific examples.
2. What can we do beyond funding to get the arts to more children in the region?
3. What could we do to help the arts get "a seat at the table" in all <sup>3</sup>\_\_\_\_\_ Tennessee communities?

### **Community Impact of the Arts**

It was an easy task for participants to list general ways the arts benefit communities and these fell into three areas, the impact of the arts on individuals, on communities or districts, and on economic development of cities and regions. As for individual impacts, many people mentioned the role the arts play in student success, in the development of individual self-expression and self-confidence, and in the overall quality of life regardless of one's age. Some of the specific examples given included field trips by schools to arts performances and arts participation programs – Bristol Ballet, the Barter Theatre, Dance Alive in Knoxville, Glass Street Art Camp in Chattanooga, Frist Center programs for young people in Nashville, the Oasis Center in Nashville, Carpenter Art Garden in Memphis, the Germantown Performing Arts Center programs, and Urban Art Commission and Memphis Black Arts Alliance program in Memphis.



The impacts of the arts on district and community revitalization efforts were frequently mentioned. This kind of impact ranges from general improvement in overall qualities of an area such as enhance community pride and connectedness to more specific ones of real estate development, increased sales and property tax revenues and improved public facilities. Examples given included the Kingsport Carousel, public art in all regions, revitalized downtown Bristol, Chattanooga's Southside and Main Street areas, Arts Crawls in Nashville and elsewhere, The Flat Rocks Arts Festival, Cooper Young in Memphis, Overton Park and the Sears Crosstown Developments in Memphis, and McNairy County Arts programs.

At a larger scale the arts are seen to have major impacts on cities and their regions in Tennessee. They are what makes Tennessee's tourism industry among the most varied and vibrant, are helping bring retirees to settle in the state, are helping companies recruit employees from other states and cities and keeping talented people in the state once they are here. Examples given included the Kingsport and Johnson City Symphonies, the Jonesborough storytelling festival, the Blue Grass program at ETSU, the TN Arts Center in Erwin, the Southern Literature Arts Alliance in Chattanooga, Chattanooga's lively working artist and gallery scene, Cannon County programming, the Nashville Festival of Books,<sup>4</sup>—Africa in April Festival in Memphis, and in all four areas of the state the value and impact of music of all types.

#### More Art for More Children in Tennessee

It was taken as a given in all four meetings in panel and roundtable discussions that arts of all kinds contribute significantly to the success of children in school and later in the work place and other areas of life. Discussions centered on how to increase arts offering to children in and outside of school environments.

Many participants said that parents were an important part of the equation. If parents could be helped to better appreciate the importance of arts education for their children, they would be more effective advocates for the arts as decisions were made by school leaders, elected officials and even the State Department of Education. This could help counteract notions of the arts as non-essential in education and create more opportunities for children to succeed in the arts.



A number of comments had to do with broadening our general conception of and marketing of the arts so that it encompasses much more than traditional performing and visual arts such as art museums and symphonies. The arts are more and more about participating and contributing rather than just consuming and this could advance all the arts and instill greater appreciation of how to incorporate arts in education. It was stated that we need to connect art and creativity to everyday life.

A third set of comments were ideas about enhancing the effectiveness of arts educators with additional resources for field trips and hands on experiences for children and for teacher development. A number noted that lack of transportation was a significant limiting factor with regard to providing students with valuable exposure to and participation in the arts.

How to advocate more effectively at all levels was also on the minds of participants. This includes helping parents advocate with their children's schools, training arts agency staff and board members to advocate, using data and research as more effective parts of the argument, and urging TAC to help at the state level with elected officials and Department of Education officials.

Finally, attendees pointed out that lots of organizations work with children <sup>5</sup> out of school, from churches to recreations centers to non-profit organizations and they should be used as full partners in delivering arts education and participation to children. This should include engaging more non-arts agencies in collaborations and partnerships to increase arts offerings to children in all types of settings.

#### The Arts having a Seat at the Table

Three main approaches to increasing the likelihood that the arts would gain a seat at decision making tables around the state were discussed: marketing and public relations efforts, increased use of data and resource to make the case for the value of the arts, and deliberately creating and building relationships with those already at the table at the local and state levels.

Participants noted that the arts needed to do a better job of overall marketing and public relations. People will not think the arts need a seat at the table if they are not made aware of why the arts matter and reminded of their benefits. Perhaps there are ways to collaborate more effectively on marketing and to



make more use of TAC resources to do this. Grass roots arts organizations need basic marketing tips and training.

Greater use of research and data that illustrate the bottom line value of the arts to education, to communities, and to the state can go a long way toward making a seat at the table. Economic impact studies can make the case to those not inclined to support the arts when it comes to making decisions about how to use local tax resources.

Perhaps the impact of the arts on tourism is the best way to demonstrate the link to arts and state and local revenues. Several participants noted that arts advocates should regularly participate in public hearings and the meetings of governmental bodies to keep the arts and artists present in all public conversations, not just those about the arts.



## **APPENDIX A - Public Strategic Planning Meetings Panel List**

### November 20, 2013 – General Shale Brick Natural History Museum Visitor Center and Fossil Site in Gray, TN

- ∞ Scott Niswonger, President of Niswonger Foundation, Chairman Emeritus Forward Air Corporation, majority shareholder Landair Transport, Inc.
- ∞ Dennis R. Phillips, Mayor of City of Kingsport, TN
- ∞ Phil Pindzola, Director of the Public Works Administration at the City of Johnson City, TN
- ∞ Richard Rose, Producing Artistic Director, Barter Theatre, Abingdon, VA

### November 21, 2013 – Bessie Smith Cultural Center, Chattanooga, TN 7

- ∞ Dr. Jean Heise, Humanities Supervisor, Knox County Schools, Knox County
- ∞ Jill Levine, Principal, Normal Park Museum Magnet School, Hamilton County
- ∞ Tom White, Sr. Vice President, Investor Relations, Unum, Chattanooga

### December 4, 2013 – Nashville Children's Theatre, Nashville, TN

- ∞ Dr. Ted Brown, President, Martin Methodist College, Pulaski, TN
- ∞ Dr. Barbara Hodges, Executive Director, Kids for the Creative Arts, Murfreesboro, TN
- ∞ Lonnell Matthews, Metro Councilman, Operations Executive, Davidson County School Age Services, YMCA of Middle Tennessee
- ∞ Bo Spessard, Chief Executive Officer, and in-house attorney, Emma, Nashville, TN





January 11, 2014 – STAX Museum of American Soul Music, Memphis, TN

- ∞ Patsy Camp, TN Arts Commission Member, West Tennessee Healthcare Foundation Member and Jackson Arts Council Past President
- ∞ Bob Loeb, President Loeb Properties, Memphis
- ∞ Gretchen Wollert McLennon, Program Director, Authentic Assets and Communications, Hyde Foundation, Memphis
- ∞ Tim Sampson, Communications Director, Soulsville Foundation, Memphis

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